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## Study the approach of education in the virtual space in Romanian universities

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### Abstract

Consequently, the mutation produced in educational area is also drawn, concerning: learning procedures flexibility, learning objectives, dynamic covering, evolving sensitive curriculum as feed-back. The portfolio method is used to customize the different stages of the evaluation in the learning collaborative environment. The main objective of this paper is to analyse some aspects on collaborative environment focusing on educational applications used in Romanian university. We examined the use of virtual space in the learning process and we conducted a qualitative research based on an observation of 10 universities. This paper presents the results of this research and the students' attitude towards this topic. We made a diagnosis of the current situation regarding the use of virtual space in the teaching process.

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### 1. Introduction

Combining computer networks and telecommunication had inspired a new application class focused on group activities support. Such an application may be used by individuals in order to mediate their interactions in performing collaborative actions. Designers are faced with new challenges: no space borders, teams' activities coordination, provide common view of shared sensitive information for an entire team. Because a lot of these requirements are generic to any collaborative activity it's natural to define basic generic services and building blocks in order to quickly develop specific solution covering a given area. The main feature of a collaborative aspiration consist in: many players commit a suit of transactions in order to perform some common objectives. In this kind of approach, each player shares its own experience or information (part of), documents, databases, different computer application and so on. Such partners will exchange data entities and knowledge reaching common and individual objectives. By deploying this approach, the implementation of new learning methods are needed. A new dimension – collaborative environment specific – has a large impact on the learning process (methods and methodologies) because of the essential collaborative nature of learning. An entire face to face meeting is the appropriate way in communication. But sometimes this becomes a strange barrier for acquirements. Technical statement of

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collaborative environment allow a come back to the former definition of communication: not a one way information transfer but peer to peer knowledge connections, giving relevant tools for learning, in a deeper manner. E-learning is essential to further development in elsewhere around the world.

Romanian education has entered a new era. Bonk (2008) boldly proclaims that “the World is Open” for learning. The evolution of technology, the different approaches on the educational environment, all these result in an e-learning process continually adapting. From the academic practitioner's point of view it is interesting to analyse the opportunities brought by the pedagogical approach and the students' attitude towards this method. The pedagogical approach regarding e-learning is different from the classical system, as it requires flexibility, functionality, and creating a context which can be adapted throughout the whole educational process, an ideal pedagogy that allows a particular educator to effectively create educational materials while simultaneously providing the most engaging educational experiences for students.

## **2. The research results**

The use of computerized solutions for education is beneficial and generate positive effects on the entire society - education specialists state. The eLearning solutions cover the entire educational system requirements, providing tools for all levels - from policy makers in ministries to students, teachers, parents and even the public at large. Learning methods based on The eLearning succeed to adapt to the real needs of the educational process and provide students access to relevant and updated information. The Romanian educational environment is a very dynamic one. It has adapted to all requirements of the Romanian market and also assumes the new technologies.

### *2.1. The first research*

In this part of the paper I will make reference to the results of a study conducted in Romanian universities in 2011. The overall objective of the research was to use the virtual space in learning process in Romanian universities. Objectives:

O1: the existence of e-learning platforms in the researched universities

O2: identifying the activities through e-learning platforms

O3 :obtaining key information on how eLearning solutions can improve the educational process.

In Romania, the university educational environment consists of 56 state institutions of higher education, 35 accredited private institutions of higher education, 21 private institutions of higher education that have been authorized to function.

The research method was the qualitative research using observation and structured interview. Over 72% of accredited universities (out of a total of 91) in Romania use eLearning solutions in the teaching activity and in their nondidactic activity.

We conducted a qualitative research based on the observation of a total of 10 accredited universities. They were structured as follows: 6 state academic institutions and 4 private institutions.

The areas examined were areas of application, using platforms in the teaching-learning process and using platforms in the evaluation process.

After analyzing and interpreting the results we can conclude that all the researched universities have e-learning platforms. These platforms are used in 7 of the 10 universities. Students have access to these platforms which provide information of administrative nature.

By using the access account, the students and the master's degree students can visualize their grades situation, information of general interest: schedules, curricula, discipline files, announcements, tax situation. Analyzing information obtained from the observation conducted within the research, it was concluded that three universities use e-learning in their educational process. In these university students are offered course materials and seminars. Of these only two universities use an evaluation system in cyberspace. The educational process is not interactive and only part of the courses has proposed discussion systems. In all the researched universities students have discussion forums but most of these, that is 67% are managed by the students and structured by area of interest or study years. All the analysed universities have got discussion topics but the student - professor interaction on these forums is reduced.

Analyzing the assessment system in the universities in the sample in terms of using the e-learning platform in the process of evaluation we can state that the final evaluation is used in 9 out of the 10 analyzed universities. In one of the universities the ongoing evaluation is carried on through this platform.

## 2.2. *The second research*

The second part of the research consisted of a quantitative research using a sample of 120 (error=5%, probability=95%) students from three university centers. The central aim of the research was to obtain key information on how eLearning solutions can improve the educational process and formulating opinions regarding the students' attitude towards e-learning and especially e-portfolios.

Analyzing interview responses we observed that 62% of the surveyed students consider that using e-learning platforms is beneficial for their training. An issue raised by most respondents was that they would not prefer using only the platform in the teaching-evaluation process. Students considered that in order to increase the quality of education, it would be desirable to combine the classic study with the education based on the e-learning platform. Probably this is due to the Romanian educational system in which students prefer to come in contact with the professor face to face, at least partially. 72% of the respondents stated that they would like to exchange ideas with their professors through the platform. In most cases the platform hosts only the courses and the bibliographic references recommended by a professor. By analyzing the responses I can state that the platforms are not used to their full capacity and this is done to the detriment of education.

The e-portfolio, as it was designed by its creators, adds quality to the assessment process. In this case the assessment activity is not only a final one but runs continuously through the contribution of both partners involved: mentor and student alike. In this sense, the professor becomes a mentor who guides the "apprentice" throughout the whole educational process, offering the needed scientific and human support. This is where the mutations interfere in the educational system. The professor must adapt the classic pedagogy to the new reality when using the e-portfolio method. Regarding the attitude of the surveyed students towards the e-portfolio method, they were responsive to it, having a positive attitude towards the use of this assessment form. 53% considered it to be beneficial, 33% stated that it would not bring a major contribution and the rest were indifferent. An e-portfolio can contain different types of information: about digital and non-digital works created by the subject (or participant in the creation of), about activities attended by the subject, about the skills acquired by the subject; evaluation notes; reflections or assessments; the results obtained in all the tests; contextual information underlying the interpretation of the results; how they are related to other pieces of information.

## 3. **Conclusions**

The question we ask is: "what do Romanian students think of e-learning?". When it comes to the universities in the economic field, the students believe that the platform is helpful and provides additional information to the classical method. But when it comes to the technical field of education, opinions and discussions take a totally different turn. In this case the voices differ. On one hand there are the students with limited study time who consider that the independent study and the platform facilitate their learning activity, and on the other hand there is a majority who thinks that in technical education is very difficult to work your way through it without face to face explanations. However in all these approaches one can feel the presence of the quality of education.

The students' attitude towards the use of e-learning platforms is a positive one, the majority of the respondents wanted the platform to have a more widespread use.

With the educational process moving in this collaborative virtual space, the pedagogical activity must be also reconsidered. The professor's role is just as important in the educational process and his or her effort is much greater than in the classic educational environment.

The e-portfolio is seen as a good evaluation method by 34%, the rest know nothing about this method or consider it to be inopportune. This method implies hard work throughout the educational process for both of the concerned actors: student and professor. The advantages are multiple even if there are also disadvantages. Unfortunately, this method is used in our universities in a very small proportion and only partially. It also provides a basis to demonstrate the student's performance and skills compared to the performance standards set by the respective authority.

The e-learning process is not perfect and we did not propound to accredit the idea that these informatics solutions can solve the underlying problems of the educational environment. An analysis of this situation offered us the opportunity to see what is the opinion of the beneficiary (the student) regarding this subject. I never had in mind to do an analysis of the existing platforms, namely the type or the structure but only their usage in general.

This paper is an approach to the problem only from the student's point of view, only one of the actors in the educational environment. This topic would be interesting to be analyzed in further research from the perspective of the other actors involved: the professors and the economic environment, which ultimately is the beneficiary of the educational product. These aspects open the way for further research.

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